



Will Houston Have Two Pride Celebrations?

New Faces of Pride will hold a parade and festival one week before Pride Houston.



Marene Gustin · October 19, 2023 · 49 · 5 minutes read



Listen to this article
7 min

124
SHARES

Share

Tweet

Subscribe

Share

Mail

Story updated: 10/20/23

Pride in Houston has a new face—a new organization, actually—called New Faces of Pride Houston.

“For a year now, people in the community have been saying somebody has to do something about Pride,” said Realtor Bryan Cotton, the new organization’s president. “So, I did.”

New Faces of Pride Houston will have a parade and festival downtown next June 22.

Exhibit 11



New Faces of Pride Houston logo

Born during the '70s fight for equal rights in the wake of the Stonewall Riots, Houston's Pride parade made its official launch in 1979. Through the gay-bar police raids, the AIDS crisis, and a homophobic mayor in the late '70s, the nonprofit Pride Houston marched on as a rainbow beacon for the local LGBTQ community. But it has not been without internal strife. As far back as 1986, the Pride Committee quarreled over merchandise and then faced backlash in 2015 when, with little community input, it moved the Montrose-centric block party downtown. And in 2017, Pride Houston (the name of the parade's sponsor since 1992) filed a lawsuit against its former president Frankie Quijano, alleging he had refused to turn over the organization's business assets. The parties agreed to a settlement in December of that year, and Lorin "Lo" Roberts officially became the first Black female president of the organization.

Jump forward just four years, when the organization fired Roberts and filed a lawsuit against her and two former treasurers, alleging they colluded to misrepresent and hide expenditures, payments, and the overall financial standing of the organization. Countersuits followed that are still ongoing, and Roberts is currently vice president of internal affairs for Fort Bend County Pride, whose festival is set for November 12.

Exhibit 11

And during all this, the parade and festival were suspended for two years due to COVID-19. This year, the downtown parade took place without the usual pre-parade festival.

"It had been several years since we had a float in the parade," recalled Howard Huffstutler, president of The Diana Foundation, the oldest continuously active gay organization in the country that has raised and donated millions of dollars for local community organizations. "So, we paid around \$220 for a parade fee in 2020, but of course the parade was canceled. When I called about using the money for the next parade—not a refund, mind you, but just to apply it to the next parade—I was told they would do that."

When the parade resumed in 2022, Huffstutler called again and was told by the now-executive director, Kendra Walker, that they didn't have any money. "She said we had no credit because Pride had had to pay bills and that was just the way it was," he said. "Then she said we could buy a new float permit for \$2,000! She wanted to charge another nonprofit \$2,000. My board was appalled. No way could we justify that when that money could pay for a scholarship."

The Diana Foundation clarified that they had no intention of pursuing legal action over a mere \$200, especially not against another nonprofit within the community. A different vendor at Pride Houston exhibited a less forgiving attitude regarding the nonprofit's outstanding website maintenance fee.

"We were hired in March of 2022," said Heather Taylor of her Mad Hat Maven creative agency. "We did the rebrand, new website, parade theme—all of it." Taylor said the nonprofit was so short staffed that her staff wound up working at the festival, she even took tickets at the gate. But when Pride month ended, they were told they weren't needed anymore. "We still had two months on our contract when June was over, but they said we were done," Taylor said.

Exhibit 11

Eventually, the nonprofit (now rebranded as Pride Houston 365) paid the rest of Mad Hat Maven's contract, but not the money owed for maintaining the website. Taylor said it's not about the money, but the principle. "You don't just stop paying your bills." Mad Hat Maven has been trying to collect approximately \$2,000 for website services since last September, and decided to sue this year.

Pride Houston 365 Executive Director Kendra Walker denied speaking to Howard Huffstutler or having any correspondence about the rollover fee. She also said Mad Hat Maven Creative was in violation of their contract. That lawsuit is still pending.

Despite all the ongoing issues, Pride Houston 365 is making plans for 2024, having secured permits for June 29 for the festival and parade, with a theme of "You Won't Break Our Pride."



Pride Houston 365 logo

"We are financially solvent, we already have the money for 2024 and sponsors like ABC13 (our local TV affiliate), and we will open registration on October 23," says Executive Director Kendra Walker. "But we were surprised that another organization had applied for the week before."

Susan Christian, director of the Mayor's Office of Special Events, confirmed the dates.

Exhibit 11

"The new organization has a lot of people we have worked with for years," Christian says. "The events are not on conflicting dates, we wouldn't encourage having two Pride parades," she said, "but we can do it. There's always room to be Prideful."

In fact, Houston has had two Martin Luther King parades on MLK Day for several years. And Los Angeles and the City of West Hollywood (WeHo) split up in 2022, with the nonprofit L.A. Parade moving back to L.A. and WeHo now hosting its own Pride parade and events. This year they had two parades a week—and just a few miles—apart.

The L.A. Times reported then that: *Tensions between LA Pride's parent organization, Christopher Street West, and West Hollywood's city fathers had simmered for years. There was a disastrous attempted rebrand in 2016 that critics dubbed "gay Coachella," spats over accounting, and a widespread feeling among queer Angelenos of color that the organization and the city were unwelcoming and unrepresentative.*

"I don't think our city can support two events of that magnitude," said Walker. "We were shocked to see all the people on the new board who have worked with us in the past and some who are involved in the ongoing lawsuits."

"We know most of the members," she adds. "It is what it is, there's nothing we can do about it. It's going to be interesting, but the goal should be that Houston has a celebration."

When asked if the two organizations could merge, Walker was pretty certain that would not happen.

"I don't think so," she said. "If that were the case, they would have contacted us before."

Cotton said New Faces of Pride Houston had a board meeting in July, and already has sponsors for next year's events. The

Exhibit 11

organization has been approved as a charity by the Texas Secretary of State and is now an active 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

"The City has been very happy to work with us," he said. "And the performing arts organizations are backing us, Houston Grand Opera was very happy to hear about us. Plus, we have bars where we intend to have Happy Hours every month." New Faces of Pride Houston will host its first official event November 9 at Rich's Houston.

"People have been coming out of the woodwork to support us," said Cotton. "It's a sign that this is what the community needs right now and that we are doing the right thing."

For more information about New Faces of Pride Houston, visit newfacesofpride.org and for Pride Houston 365, pridehouston365.org.

Comments